

❖ ECRH Notes ❖

Ecumenical Center for Religion and Health, San Antonio, TX

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Coping with War

In times of conflict, individuals may experience increased anxiety, fear, grief and stress. The Ecumenical Center offers these suggestions for coping and signs to watch for.

Find your known pockets of security: in the home, with family, in family traditions and with community.

Stay intelligently aware: access original information sources to gain complete information. Don't overload on "breaking" news media and short sound bites.

Reach out for social support: find it among family, faith communities, neighborhoods and friends.

Manage stress in healthy ways: exercise, laugh, pray, engage in hobbies.

Gain control in positive ways: take the time to educate yourself on the issues, find ways to increase your feeling of safety at home and in the community, dialog with those who view things differently from you and pray.

Focus on life-giving activities: enjoy a family meal; marvel at the beauty of the nature; spend time in meditation, worship and prayer; make a phone call to someone you love.

Contribute time and resources to others.

Get enough sleep.

What are you experiencing?

There are many causes of stress, including change, expectations, time pressure, work, finances, illness and more. Whatever the cause, remember that stress is a matter of degree and intensity. War only increases the pressure and may cause us to react more strongly to everyday stressors.

Stress can cause psychological symptoms:

- Depression, withdrawal
- Mental fatigue
- Chronic anxiety
- Sense that things are slipping out of control
- Negative thinking
- Difficulty making decisions
- Exaggerated worrying
- Paranoia
- Impatience
- Forgetfulness
- Apathy
- Confusion
- Anger and hostility

Stress can cause physical symptoms:

- Stimulation of the cardiovascular system
- Gastrointestinal over-activity
- Tightening of the muscles
- Headaches
- Weight changes
- Increase in infections and cancer
- Rashes, itching
- Insomnia
- Unexplained fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Nervous tics, tremors

- Perspiration or cold, clammy hands
- Teeth and jaw clenching.

Stress can cause behavioral symptoms:

- Irritation with friends, colleagues and family members
- Bossiness
- Outbursts of temper

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For help or more information

Contact any of the Ecumenical Center's Counseling staff at (210) 616-0885, if you, your family, friends or associates need help during this time. Staff counselors are available for consultation or counseling for individuals, couples, families and workplaces. Fee subsidy is available.

Counseling Staff

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Dear Friends,

During times of crisis and loss we often find ourselves wondering what to do, what to say, what to look for in our loved ones. This is particularly true when the children of our community are involved. The information contained on these two pages is meant to help you and those you know in addressing these questions. Keeping with our 35 year tradition of service and caring we offer it to you and ask that you share it with others.

Paul A. Parks, D.Min., Executive Director

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- Withdrawal, detachment
- Change in sleeping or eating patterns
- Change in sexual drive
- Accident proneness
- Reckless driving
- Inappropriate laughing
- Reversals in usual behavior
- Compulsive shopping or eating
- Increased use of tranquilizers, alcohol and cigarettes

A word about grief

There are many who are also grieving. They may be grieving for loved ones who have been sent overseas. They may be grieving friends or families who participated or were lost in wars past.

People who are grieving express their feelings in many different ways and work through the grief at varying paces. They may be in denial or angry or depressed. They may act out or withdraw. There is more information the grief process at our website, www.ecrh.org.

For more detail and information, visit our website at www.ecrh.org

A Word About Handling Differences of Opinion

The start of the "shock and awe campaign" triggered one of the heaviest days of anti-government protesting in years. Many families find their members disagreeing on the issue. Some faith communities are divided with clergy and laity on all sides of the issue. In some communities, differences are erupting into conflict and violence.

Can individuals disagree and communicate with passion and conviction while maintaining respect? The Ecumenical Center offers these ten tips on how to share differences in ways that don't end up causing rifts in relationships.

1. Begin with a commitment to understand *to the very best of your ability* the other person's point of view. Agree that your primary goal is to learn and understand as much as possible about what the other person thinks, feels, wants, needs, knows or assumes about the issue.
2. Value and practice *dialogue* while recognizing that debate is a game designed to determine winners and losers, not to foster understanding and community. Utilize dialogue to promote listening and the fair exchange of ideas. A mutual commitment to understanding ensures your perspective will be understood.
3. Remain open and aware of the sacredness of all God's people and creation.
4. Ask yourself, "Am I being drawn only to people with similar views or am I maintaining dialogue with people

who hold other opinions?" Isolation will only intensify conflict.

5. Avoid late night conversations and keep all conversations time limited. Dialogue is hard work that is best accomplished when we are at our best.

6. Recognizing that we sometimes do not know what to say or need time to reflect, never try to force another person into talking. Expect times of silence and plan other times to talk after an opportunity for reflection.

7. Statements made in anger are often invalid. Allow yourself the freedom to revisit the topic at a calmer time rather than being reactive to the anger. When you become aware of being angry, it's helpful signal to step back and look inside yourself rather than striking out at the other person.

8. Bring clarity to the conversation by using "I" messages..."I think. I feel. I want." When we begin using "you" messages, conversations deteriorate into debate.

9. Develop a community-focused world view (rather than solely an individualistic or nationalistic view) where we accept that we are as much a part of each other when we disagree as when we agree.

10. Discussions facilitated by drinking frequently lack understanding, wisdom and compassion.

True understanding is possible when we dialogue from the foundation of affirming the inherent value of each individual. When the focus becomes the relationship rather than the issue, we are more able to build peace within our own ranks.

Ecumenical Center for Religion and Health

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